

US Engagement In Africa:

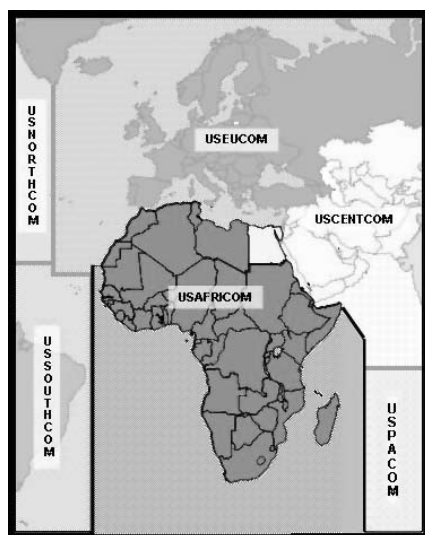
A Case Study In AFRICOM Strategic Communications

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Abstract: The authors describe the evolution of US policies and attitudes toward the nation states of Africa, and how the creation of a new unified combatant command structure will enhance American/African relationships. They analyze major tasks and themes, and recommend methods for successful application of US messages.

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Headlines across Africa are making incredible assertions about US intentions on the African continent. "The New US Command for Africa will militarize the continent," is one position. Another reads, "AFRICOM: Another Grasp of an American Epileptic," adding the new command is "sinister" and "hideous." Another paper in Egypt states that Washington is "using the pretext of combating terrorism as a cover for hiding its real aims." The article claims America's "real aim" is to "grab the continent" in an effort to seize Africa's oil and mineral resources. What we, US joint officers, see as twisting of the truth, the African population most likely accepts as fact. If there is no other information to counter media propaganda, the propaganda will be accepted as truth. Although the US has made great strides in US Africa Command (AFRICOM) implementation planning, including the development of a comprehensive Strategic Communication (SC) Plan, how can these headlines and many other similar articles continue to go unchallenged? If we do not challenge, and challenge quickly, this media propaganda, half-truths, and rumors that are spreading across the African continent, we will lose the battle of perception. Losing the perception battle before the official stand-up of the newest and most promising global partnership venture is the last thing the US needs today. However, to this point, the US has not sufficiently articulated its engagement policy in Africa and must develop a Strategic Communication



AFRICOM Area of Responsibility.
(DOD)

model that targets four key world audiences: US to US Domestic, US to International Community, US to Africa, and Africa to International Community.

This paper will introduce the US engagement policy in Africa and the benefits of the new command. The message that needs to be told is that the new command's objectives includes boosting the capacity of African nations to combat terrorism on their own, enhancing humanitarian assistance, bolstering respect for human rights, partnering with African nations, and carrying out combined peace promoting operations, as required. Next, this paper will describe the draft AFRICOM SC Plan and expose its strengths and weaknesses. A new SC planning model will be discussed which is built around the four key world audiences and explain how every SC plan needs to consider these four audiences. Finally, the paper will suggest new themes and messages joint AFRICOM planners must

immediately begin staffing through the interagency and begin articulating to the US, the International Community, Africa's leaders and most importantly Africa's people.

Engagement Policy In Africa

On February 6, 2007 President George W. Bush announced that the Department of Defense will create a Defense Unified Combatant Command for Africa by the end of fiscal year 2008. The President specifically cited his reasons for standing up US AFRICOM as "to strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa. AFRICOM will enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa."

Prior to defining the engagement policy in Africa, we must first define the strategic interests of the US in Africa. Africa plays a critical role in the world and its importance is a major factor in the policy of the US. The number one national interest in Africa articulated by the US is to strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism. In addition to defeating global terrorism, other US interests in Africa include: promoting democracy and human rights, economic growth and development, health, education, reduction of armed conflict, HIV/AIDS reduction, crisis response, and continued oil/global trade. A Pentagon briefing on AFRICOM pointed out its significant strategic and economic importance saying, "our focus is to build the capacity of our African partners to reduce conflict, improve security, defeat terrorists and support crisis response."

The US engagement policy in Africa is not one based upon the world's super power flexing its muscles and filling a leadership void in Africa, but instead is based on assisting existing African organizations while strengthening their capacity to do increasingly more. Outlining this policy to the current leaders in Africa, and more importantly to the African public, is absolutely critical to the success of AFRICOM. Ryan Henry, Pentagon Policy Chief outlined this policy in an April press briefing saying, "the goal is for AFRICOM not to be a US leadership role on the continent, but rather to support African leadership efforts... We would be looking to complement rather than compete with any leadership efforts currently going on."

Description Of Africa Command

AFRICOM is in the final stages of being created out of US European Command in Stuttgart, Germany and will be led by GEN William E. Ward, Deputy Commander of US European Command. Although the headquarters is currently in Stuttgart, Germany, it will ultimately be located somewhere in Africa. The draft mission statement of AFRICOM is:

US Africa Command promotes US National Security objectives by working with African states and regional organizations to help strengthen stability and security in the AOR. US Africa Command leads the in-theater DOD response to support other USG security policies and strategies. In concert with other US government and international partners, US Africa Command conducts theater security cooperation activities to assist in building security capacity and improve accountable governance. As directed, US Africa Command conducts military operations to deter aggression and respond to crisis.

This mission statement is consistent with the President's stated intent in US national strategy documents. The focus of AFRICOM will be primarily humanitarian, economic, and diplomatic with a focus on "prevention of conflict, rather than military intervention," according to Theresa Whelan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs.

In other words, AFRICOM is not your typical military command and will be the first command of its kind. AFRICOM will be a close-knit organization of military, state department, and non-governmental (NGOs) entities integrated as a support function to African leadership and regional organizations.

In order for AFRICOM to be successful and accomplish its mission the command must work in cooperation with African leaders, states, US government agencies and other NGOs and partners to conduct its essential tasks. The tasks focus on working with African leaders in order to build partners and strengthen security and stability on the African continent. Conducting combat and military operations is the last priority and will be conducted only when specifically directed. As Principal Deputy Under Secretary Henry said recently, "its principle mission will be in the area of security cooperation and building partnership capability. It will not be in warfighting."

What Do Africans Think Of AFRICOM?

The goals and objectives for AFRICOM appear noble and admirable as they promote compassion and assistance to the plight of the African continent and seek to work through current structures to help build stability and capacity. But noble and admirable is the way we view the situation from our positions as US joint force officers. The real question of importance is what do Africans think about AFRICOM? Without being able to poll Africans directly, our team believed the best way to determine what Africans were thinking was to do a survey of what African media was saying. Using the resource of the US Open Source Center, which scours open source international media and translates it into English, our team searched for references to "AFRICOM" across the African region following the announcement of AFRICOM on 6 February 2007. What we found was disturbing. Of the articles reviewed, almost all reported a negative slant. Many writers indicated an outright distrust of a military presence in Africa and linked it directly to China's growing

presence in Africa. Unfortunately, President Bush's announcement of the new command came on the heels of the Beijing Summit on China-Africa Cooperation in November 2006 in which 48 of 54 African nations attended. President Bush's announcement appeared to be a response to this China-African summit, although planning for AFRICOM had been in the works since shortly after 11 Sep 01.

To date, the African media has been extremely negative and distrustful of the new command. A 2 Mar 2007 Open Source Report cites a South African think-tank that believes AFRICOM could undermine the African Union's (AU) efforts. The report warns that a US military presence could cause Al-Qaeda attacks to increase in Africa. South Africa based *Business Day* says that "AFRICOM would destabilize an already fragile continent and region, which would be forced to engage with US interests on military terms." A Zimbabwe paper, *The Herald*, reports the plan is a "sinister and hideous construct plainly meant to oversee US military activities on the continent." Multiple writers complain of US involvement due solely to oil, such as, "among the key goals for the new command, for example, is the assurance of oil imports from Africa." Lagos' *The Guardian* commented that "Washington has paid increasing attention to Africa in recent years, partly out of anxiety that African states can be a haven for Islamist militants and also because of an interest on its natural resources." Another writer worried that AFRICOM would "open the door to an Israeli military and intelligence presence in Africa" and "facilitate a sudden aggressive presence of NATO forces across the continent." There were many other examples, but if this small representative sample of articles and commentaries is what the African public is hearing, how can they trust the new command? The general public is left with these negative messages about AFRICOM, and very little appears to be countering the African media's information campaign.

Review Of Draft AFRICOM Strategic Communication Plan

The draft AFRICOM SC Plan found in the AFRICOM Implementation Plan provides a variety of themes and messages that the DOD would like to convey to a number of audiences, both domestic and international. Individually, each message is detailed and targeted toward a specific audience but are not organized within an audience domain. For this reason, the messages lose rhythm and synergy and detract from the overall flow of the plan. Additionally, the desired effects of the messages are not clearly articulated, making any assessment of their effectiveness immeasurable or at least difficult to measure.

The plan does attempt to organize themes and messages in the following categories:

- How AFRICOM benefits the US
- How AFRICOM is Designed to Address African Security Challenges
- The US Remains Committed to NATO and European Allies

Ultimately, however, the messages remain sporadic across domains and miss a number of key audiences that should be included within the broader context. For example, “The US Remains Committed to NATO and European Allies” is part of a theme directed from the US toward a part of the International Community; NATO and Europe being a subset of that community. By not including the messages directed from the US to other international audiences, we lose the overall theme the US is trying to portray to the international community—not just NATO and Europe. The format of the plan should stay standardized and consistent. It should effectively organize messages within a broader audience domain woven into overarching themes, measurable against effects and objectives. Doing so would make the SC plan a much more effective and executable product for DOD and USG agencies.

To summarize, we believe the SC plan has the following strengths:

- Provides comprehensive and sufficient detail in each theme and message.



Figure 1. Proposed New Strategic Communication Planning Model: The Four Domains.

- Messages are clear and target very specific audiences.

- Themes and messages are linked to our strategic objectives as articulated in the NMS, NDS, and QDR.

However, we believe the draft SC plan has the following shortcomings which form the basis for our recommendation for a new SC planning model, applicable to all future SC plans, described later in this paper:

- Needs standardization and consistency in format. Maintain organization and synchronization within target audience domains.

- Desired effects and objectives should be stated against each message and theme in order to measure success, and equally important, to adjust our SC plan and implementation if necessary. Consistent with other Effects Based Planning, Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) and Measures of Performance (MOP) should be included.

- Define how and when messages should be released and controls on how to limit the wrong messages.

A New Strategic Communication Planning Model

Our proposed model (Figure 1) provides planners a framework to

develop SC plans in an organized and consistent way; developing and synchronizing themes and messages into four broader domains based on groups of primary target audiences: (1) US to US Domestic, (2) US to Target Nation, (3) US to International and (4) Target Nation to International. This enables commanders to maximize and achieve greater desired effects and measurable achievement of objectives. The foundation of this model is based on appropriately established desired effects and objectives from which to develop themes and messages. In addition to establishing clear effects and objectives, we must also systematically conduct assessments of the plan to ensure we are achieving our stated effects and objectives. As described in JP 5.0, we can use Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) and Measures of Performance (MOP) to ensure we “are doing the right things,” and “doing things right,” respectively.

US to US Domestic: The themes and messages we want to deliver to the US domestic audience—government, defense, business, media and public. This domain explains to the US why what we are doing is important to the US. This domain is often taken for granted.

The will of the people is necessary to implement our strategy, policy, and operations in the long term in order to achieve our objectives and therefore, SC in this domain should be given appropriate consideration.

US to Target Nation: This domain refers to the primary nation with which we are implementing a strategy, policy, or operation. Our plan should focus on that nation's government, business, and public much like the US to Domestic domain. Themes, messages and desired effects in this domain should address the government, economy, the military and society – and individuals, if we require strong public support. This domain can also be framed in terms of groups, if we are trying to target a non-state, ethnic and/or religious-based diasporas.

US to International: This domain addresses any audience outside the US Domestic or Target Nation(s) audience. In this domain we are trying to either gain support for what we are doing in the target audience domain, or at least minimize undesired effects coming from the international community. More often than not, we will be operating in a coalition, multi-nationally, and/or within an alliance. Just as the will of the people is necessary to foster in the US Domestic domain, gaining the support and will of many nations will help us achieve those objectives.

Target Nation to International: This domain is likely the most underdeveloped part of nearly all SC plans. It refers to the themes and messages we would like to see the target nation's government and military amplify to the international community in support of our strategic message. It is critical to articulate a desired objective of what we would want key African leaders to say about US strategy, policy, or operations in Africa. For example, what do we want African leaders to say to the Chinese about AFRICOM? We should establish objectives/effects that will answer this question, and then engage those African

leaders to help shape the desired outcome. The goal is for the Target Nation to understand, believe, and embrace what we are saying and doing in their countries so that potential adversaries will hear a consistent message.

One example from the current AFRICOM SC Plan highlights the need to establish clear desired effects, objectives, and measures of assessment (MOE/MOP) prior to developing themes and messages. The plan provides specific messages for Congress on the establishment of AFRICOM, but does not link those messages to desired effects and objectives such as enabling funding, engendering support, changing perceptions, or a combination thereof. Without knowing the effects and objectives, the themes and messages could actually be harmful rather than helpful.



A local level cultural exchange in Tanzania. (US Navy)

In summary, themes and messages must be designed to achieve desired effects and objectives or they can be irrelevant or possibly counterproductive.

Current and Proposed AFRICOM Themes & Messages

Most Americans do not realize the importance of US national interests in Africa and the economic and strategic importance of Africa in global affairs. The themes and messages for our domestic audience focus on these interests and: how AFRICOM benefits the US, how a stable Africa helps the security of the US and on our obligation to prevent and respond to humanitarian crisis. Some themes and messages that

outline the benefits of AFRICOM to the US include:

- Africa matters to the US because a stable, healthy, and more prosperous Africa will contribute to global security and a stronger world economy.
- AFRICOM will work with African leaders to help develop solutions and strategies that strengthen the continent's security and stability.
- AFRICOM is an interagency organization that represents a new method of enabling us to assist African partners to achieve the goal of African renewal.

Africa's stability has a direct correlation to the security of the US. An unstable Africa provides an environment that allows terrorists to fester and carry out planning and training of future attacks on US soil. Themes and messages that convey this include:

- AFRICOM allows the US to help address a new set of global security risks.
- AFRICOM will help to strengthen alliances within the African continent to defeat global terrorism.
- AFRICOM will work closely with African leaders and other international organizations to defuse regional conflict.

The US has an obligation as a superpower to address the growing humanitarian crisis issues on the African continent. It is our national interest to promote human dignity throughout the world. Themes and messages that express this include:

- HIV and infectious diseases are needlessly killing thousands of Africans each year.
- AFRICOM will lead an integrated government team that facilitates addressing the growing health concerns within Africa.
- The US is a champion for human dignity and promotes a healthy well being for all people.

Probably the least developed of all messages in the current AFRICOM SC plan are those from the US to the African people. Although there are many themes

and messages that address Africa directly, most of those messages are aimed at governments and how AFRICOM will benefit Africa in larger terms of peace, security, and stability. What Africa needs are those messages that explain how AFRICOM will benefit the people in terms to which they can relate. In a recent Web-log on NigerianFactor.com, a site dedicated to Africans discussing African issues, we asked the question, what do you think about AFRICOM? One African responder to our question, with a user name of "Lade" gave an answer that was very telling as he/she answers for his/her countrymen. In the Web-log, "Lade" said:

"This can be a good idea if implemented carefully and effectively. However, the best ways to win the heart and soul of African citizens will be to go in with something that will help to improve their lives. Every nation needs security against extreme ideological and religion fanaticism. If such a command will help to improve such security, it's all good."

The important statement in this quote is that in order to win the heart and soul of the African citizen, we need to explain how AFRICOM will improve their individual lives. Yes, the larger concept of security is critical, but we need to be able to articulate the improvement to Africans' daily lives rather than simply stating "greater security" to answer that question. All messages must answer the question: How will AFRICOM improve African lives? Although it is important not to oversell what AFRICOM can do, it is important to relate what AFRICOM means for the average person on the street. Recommended messages to start flowing to Africa in a new media blitz/campaign include:

- Better economies and more jobs as Africans allow AFRICOM to assist their leaders and organizations.
- AFRICOM, a new partner in the battle against sickness and disease.
- AFRICOM deploys assistance... not troops.
- AFRICOM is in partnership with Africans. This partnership will calm regional tensions which will lead to peace,

security, jobs, plus greater opportunities for trade and food supplies.

- AFRICOM for Africans... prosperity and security for all people.
- AFRICOM... allow organizations to get aid to go where it is needed most.
- Peace, prosperity, security... AFRICOM cares for you and your family.
- AFRICOM will provide an environment to allow education and peace to flourish.
- Slogan: AFRICOM helping Africans.

Themes and Messages for US to the International Community

The creation of AFRICOM may be looked at by the international community as the early stage of a US attempt to project its power in order to dominate the world. This clearly is not a perception we can allow to go unchallenged. Our themes and messages to the international community outside of Africa need to center on the benefits of AFRICOM to the international community and our continued commitment to our international partners. Themes and messages that address these two points include:

- An AFRICOM goal is for a stronger AU that will work hand in hand with the EU and UN
- AFRICOM will strengthen regional and sub-regional organizations and strengthen regional security capacity
- AFRICOM will address such transnational threats as health, crime and maritime security, and terrorism.
- AFRICOM will emphasize shared responsibility for addressing African security interests.
- The creation of AFRICOM will not alter our relations with NATO and our European allies.

Themes and Messages for Target Nation to International Community

The final category are those themes and messages we want African leaders to convey to the International Community. Although we cannot force African

leaders to "tow the party line" and simply parrot information we want them to say, we can have frank discussions at the diplomatic/political and senior military leadership engagement programs to express the importance of speaking the same language. The importance of this category is clear. As the world hears Africa speaking a clear, consistent, and coordinated message, the international community will see the strength of the US-African relationship. This show of strength is critical to countering the negative influence from competing countries. Suggested themes include:

- Africans want AFRICOM.
- The African people want a strong partnership with the United States through AFRICOM.
- Africa enjoys the benefits of rapid humanitarian and crisis response provided through AFRICOM.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The success of AFRICOM depends not only on how the US implements its policy on the Africa continent but also on how the US executes its strategic communication plan. To date the US has not done a very good job of articulating a comprehensive message (SC plan driven) that clearly states its engagement policies in Africa. Our desire is for final AFRICOM SC Plan to be comprehensive and fully explain the strategic communication from objectives, through effects, to themes/messages, and how/when to execute. Not limited to AFRICOM planning, it is necessary to develop a new SC model that engages four key world audiences: US to US Population; US to International Community; US to Africa; and Africa to International Community. Using this model and the stated themes and messages, we believe AFRICOM will effectively communicate US intentions and benefits to Africa. Finally, it is imperative that we get these messages out today in a coordinated Defense, State, and interagency media campaign. The AFRICOM word is on the African street, but the word is not good. We must move today to change the perception of

African media and the African people to enable US AFRICOM to be as successful in its goals and objectives as it claims.

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